

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, ranking members Miner and France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Debra Feldman, I am from Stamford. I am a business owner, parent, former nurse and concerned citizen who abhors violence and shudders at the thought of another Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

I am testifying in support of the \$3.6 million included in the Governor's budget adjustment bill for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence prevention programs.

I firmly believe that one way to thwart gun violence is anticipating dangerous or violent behaviors using guns and prevent at risk individuals from accessing guns, buying guns and purchasing ammunition.

Funding is necessary to support initiatives to reduce gun violence.

- Gun violence is an urgent public health crisis that demands the state invest more to save lives. Last year gun homicides were the highest in 25 years, nearly double the level in 2018.
- There's an urgent need to take action: on average, someone in CT is murdered with a gun once every three days.
- The governor's proposal is a good start; but the legislature can strengthen it: allocate more dollars for community-based programs, ensure there is dedicated staff in the Department of Public Health Office of Injury Prevention to support the effort.
- Solutions need to go beyond strong gun laws and law enforcement; they are necessary but not sufficient to de-escalate conflict and break cycles of violence that too often involve guns.
- Evidence-based prevention and intervention programs aimed at individuals at high risk of perpetrating or being victims of gun violence are known reduce shootings and killings in high-violence communities.
- The state needs to invest more in community-based prevention and intervention solutions; it has ample resources to do so. According to the [CT Mirror](#), Connecticut has a projected budget surplus of more than \$2 billion. In total, the state got \$6.3 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act.
- If the state can afford more than \$300 million in tax cuts, as proposed by the Governor, it can afford to invest more than \$3.6 million spread over two years from federal pandemic relief.
- Beyond the loss of life and profound impact on communities that experience high levels of gun violence, it has a tremendous economic cost. According to [Everytown](#)

and [Giffords Law Center](#), it's estimated that gun violence (of all kinds) costs Connecticut taxpayers between \$60 and \$90 million annually, and carries a yearly societal cost of up to \$1.2 billion. It's [estimated](#) that the law enforcement and healthcare costs of a single gun homicide are \$488,000, and each non-fatal shooting costs \$71,000.

- If we want to achieve racial justice, we must make people safe in the communities where they live. To do so requires funding community-based prevention and intervention programs that have proven track records of reducing gun violence.
- Racial justice cannot be achieved if Black people experience gun violence at far higher rates than white people. Connecticut victims of gun homicide are disproportionately people of color. Approximately 56% of the state's gun homicide victims are Black; however, only 10% of the state's population is Black. Young Black men in Connecticut are almost 39 times more likely to be killed with a gun than similarly aged white men.
- Black and Hispanic children are routinely exposed to gun violence—they witness shootings, hear gunshots, and know friends, relatives and family members who have been shot or killed. Childhood experiences with violence and exposure to gun behaviors can change brain development and has immediately harmful effects, especially related to learning. These adverse childhood experiences are also linked to lifelong consequences including chronic health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, increased likelihood of criminal behavior, forming healthy relationships and having stable employment.

While I commend the Governor for proposing \$3.6 million to fund community gun violence prevention programs, I urge the legislature to do more. It should create an Office of Gun Violence Prevention in the Department of Public Health, and commit to more substantial levels of funding.

Thank you for this opportunity to present my testimony today.

Sincerely,

Debra Feldman

Stamford, CT

February, 22, 2022